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ABSTRACT

This compilation of 19 articles provides ideas and solutions for creating and improving family, community, and school partnerships. A broad variety of topics are covered including: (1) ideas for celebrating American Education Week; (2) 10 tips for family reading; (3) reading aloud to older children; (4) using take-home folders to inspire kindergartners to love reading; (5) 25 ideas for communicating curriculum goals to families; (6) teacher tips for communicating with families to ensure student success; (7) parent advisory councils; (8) tips for family involvement practices at the high school level; (9) characteristics of successful partnership schools; (10) steps and questions for schools to use to get organized with family-community-school partnership efforts; (11) three samples of family-school partnership board policies; (12) the national family-school partnership mission statement and partnership promise; (13) tips for connecting immigrant parents and schools; (14) involving parents in schoolwork through the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) program; (15) teaching character education including courage, honesty, respect, and responsibility; (16) directory of resources for family-community-school partnerships; (17) 6 types of family-community participation; and (18) checklist for schools for making partnerships work. (SD)

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Families • Communities • Schools Learning Together Fall 1996

Ruth Anne Landsverk
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Madison, Wisconsin

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Foreword

"Are you learning anything in kindergarten?" a mother told me she asked her five-year-old early in the school year. The little girl thought for a moment and replied, "Yes, but I don't know what."

Perhaps the kindergartner was trying to tell her mother that her school experience was all so new—even a little bewildering—that it takes time to figure out what you're supposed to be doing with all that new knowledge! If there is one thing I have learned during my past three years in this office, it is that it is critical for us, as educators, parents, businesspeople, and citizens, to listen.

In no area is this skill more essential than in creating and strengthening family-community partnerships with the schools. It used to be that a good teacher was supposed to be the dispenser of knowledge, to ask hard questions, and have all the answers. Since then, I have learned that the questions themselves may provide the answers. Questions such as,

- Where is the office?
- How can I contact my child's teacher?
- What will my child be learning this year? and
- How can I volunteer at home?

give us clues about what families need and want from their children's schools. How often do we ask families what *we* can do for *them*? To me, that is the critical question that we must ask. How well we strive to discover the hopes and expectations of families for their children, to find out what they want education to look like in five years, and how they would like to help their children learn at home will determine how well our children learn.

"Effective reform leaders cultivate a broad definition of community and consider the contribution that every member can make to helping children meet challenging standards. They hear the voices of many stakeholders—families, businesses, and other groups . . . establishing partnerships and listening to a chorus of voices," a report called, "The Role of Leadership in Sustaining School Reform," by 1995-96 National Principal of the Year Adel Nadeau, concludes.

It has been a continual source of joy and inspiration, as I travel around the state, to see how passionately families and community members care about education and schools. Whether attending public forums on citizenship, the standards, technology, or school-to-work, our mission is to listen, to gain consensus, and then to act.

I hope that the Fall 1996 Learning Together packet, the latest in a series of resources published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction since 1987, serves as a tool for listening and acting to create or improve family-community partnerships in your school or community. The packet features ideas for linking families to learning and for communicating with them, for organizing your partnership efforts and invigorating your Parent Advisory Council, for celebrating American Education Week, and lots more.

Please, let us know how we're doing! How can we help advance your partnership efforts? Call Jane Grinde (608-266-9356) or Ruth Anne Landsverk (608-266-9757) at DPI with your suggestions and questions. We're listening!

John T. Benson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, throughout American history, schools have helped democratize our nation, strengthen our communities, and widen opportunities for all people; and

WHEREAS, by integrating different groups through commonly shared values, schools prepare this nation's diverse population to live harmoniously in a democratic society; and

WHEREAS, education employees strive continually to serve our children and our communities with dedication, professionalism, and compassion; and

WHEREAS, for generations, our schools have answered the call to cultivate the future leaders of our families, our communities, and our nation; and

WHEREAS, there is no greater legacy than the sound education of our children;

Now, therefore,

I, _____,

serving as _____

of _____,

Do hereby proclaim November 17-23, 1996, as the 75th annual observance of

AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK

Signed this _____ day of _____, 1996

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Celebrate American Education Week:

The Future Begins in Today's Schools

American Education Week (AEW) is a time for re kindling citizens' interest in local schools—whether or not they have children presently attending them. Today's students are tomorrow's employees, citizens, voters, and taxpayers. Today's students will play a major role in shaping the quality of our future lives. For over a century, American adults have used public debate about educating the next generation as a forum to decide what kind of future they want for their children, their community, and the country as a whole.

Here are some ideas schools can use to celebrate American Education Week:

Say Thanks. Have students write a short thank you note to someone—teacher, guidance counselor, support staff member, volunteer—anyone who works or has worked in a school and has helped them in the past.

Target Your Alumni. Hold a reunion day, inviting alumni to return to school and talk with the students, visit with each other, and see what schools are like today. Use the occasion to launch an Alumni Hall of Fame, inviting nominations from the community, students, and parents, as well as alumni participants.

Spotlight District Initiatives. More than 70 percent of communication is getting the attention of your audience. AEW helps you grab their attention and it's a great time to demonstrate and "show off" some of your district's or school's goals for the year and how you are accomplishing them.

Celebrate Your History. Launch a program to document your school history through interviews of alumni and senior citizens. Record these memories and moments with a video camera, and present those interviewed with copies of the finished product.

Target the Media. Invite members of the news media to talk with students about their work and covering the issues of the day. Invite student editors to interview the media regarding freedom of the press and ethics in journalism. Hit the tough issues and use cable and/or TV programming where possible.

Celebrate Cultural Diversity. Celebrate the cultural diversity in your community by bringing all groups together to share their rich heritage through music, food, and discussions. Build bridges of understanding with panels of various groups sharing their concerns about racism.

Take a Survey. Have a simple survey ready for visitors to fill out at AEW activities. Ask what information they are presently receiving about their schools. What could the schools do for them? What do they think the key problems are in education in their schools? How would they like to receive information? What programs would they like the school to offer? Remember to include a demographic question to identify those who respond, such as: Are you a parent of a student in our schools? Are you a parent of a student in a private or parochial school? Are you a senior citizen?, and so forth.

Hold an "Accountability Day." Demonstrate that your students are learning the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic. Then show them how our students are also learning critical thinking, problem solving, and other critical skills needed for future success.

Hold a Series of Parenting Meetings. Plan a series of meetings throughout the week to address concerns of parents: grading, drugs and violence, parents as teachers at home, how to ensure your child is ready for kindergarten, living with your teenager and surviving, simple and fun ways for parents to teach science at home, preparing for a career and/or college, and so forth. Hold these meetings in places convenient for parents—local church, union meeting hall, community building—as well as in the schools.

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Hold a Children's Summit. Invite business and community leaders, parents, and non-parents to address education reform, changes taking place in the schools, and steps needed to prepare students for the twenty-first century. Don't just talk, but seize the opportunity to "call for the sale." Invite participants to sign up to serve on special committees to implement suggestions made at the summit.

Hold a Parent Education Day. Exhibit student art, offer booths for local service organizations to hand out information, and talk with parents about resources available to them. Have a "food fair" with samples of items prepared by the district food service department for their breakfast and lunch menus.

Take the School to the Community. Hold demonstration classes in shopping malls, local office buildings, and so forth. Don't limit your activities to art displays and musical programs. Consider showing classrooms in action; that is, kindergarten students taking the first steps in reading readiness, primary students using computers, vocational students working on projects, and high school students debating national issues.

AEW Teacher for a Day. Invite your legislators and representatives, business leaders and elected officials to sign up to teach for a day or a class period! Be sure you have a camera record these activities, and encourage media coverage. (In fact, invite members of the media to also sign up as an AEW teacher.)

Next year's dates: November 16-22, 1997.
From the National School Public Relations Association, 1501 Lee Hwy., Ste. 201, Arlington, VA 22209; (703) 528-5840.

Celebrate Reading

Be a part of the Wisconsin Family READ-IN

Sunday, November 24, 1996
5:00—8:00 p.m.
on Wisconsin Public Radio

Children's Call-in Show and discussion of favorite children's literature

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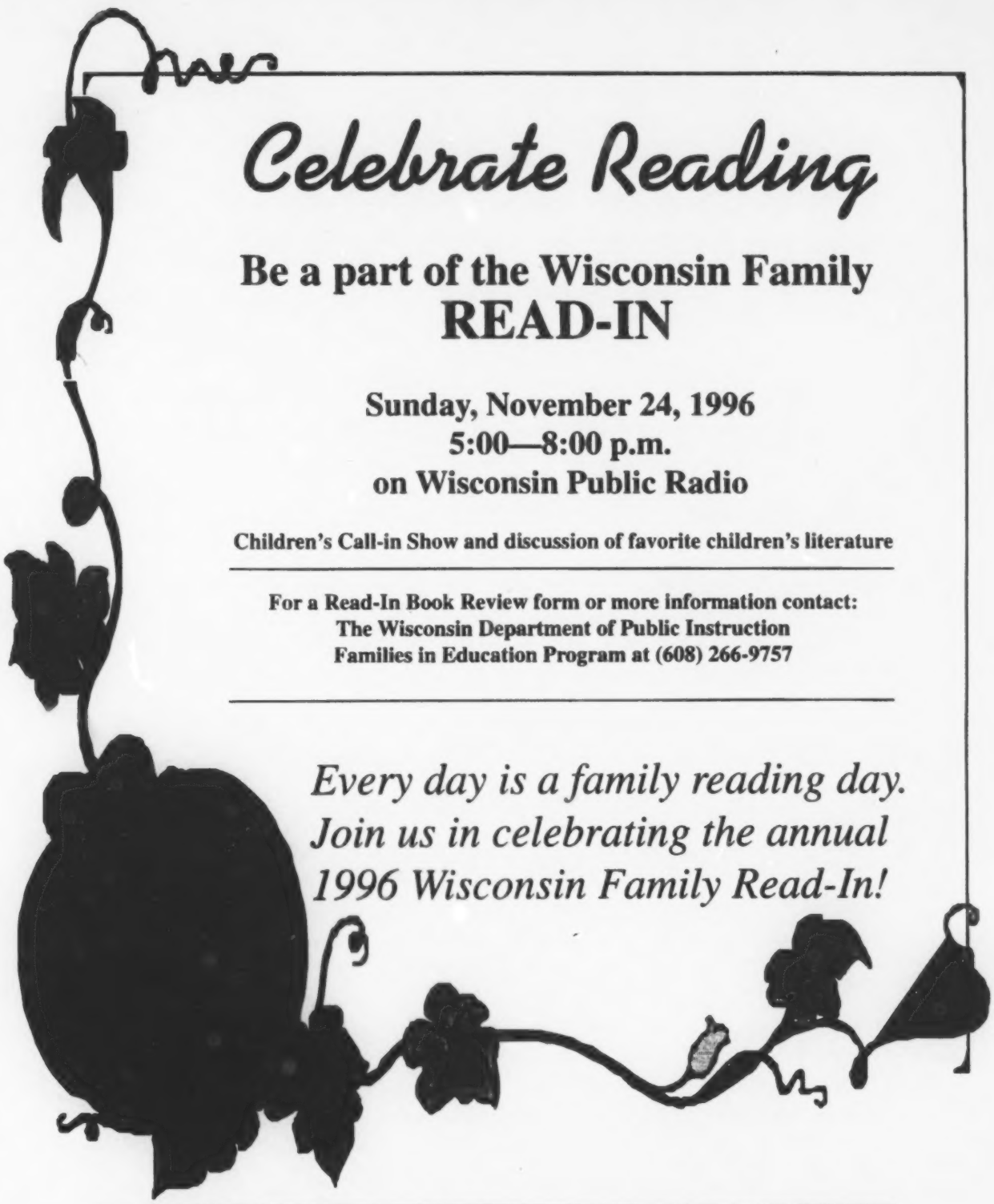
For a Read-In Book Review form or more information contact:
The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Families in Education Program at (608) 266-9757

Every day is a family reading day.
Join us in celebrating the annual
1996 Wisconsin Family Read-In!



The 1996 Wisconsin Family Read-In is sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin Public Radio with the support of the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, Wisconsin Association of Public Librarians, Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, Wisconsin Association of School Librarians, Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association, Wisconsin Educational Media Association, Wisconsin Education Association Council, Wisconsin PTA, Wisconsin State Reading Association, Friends of the Cooperative Children's Book Center, and the Governor's Office of Literacy and Lifelong Learning.

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Read Together, Grow Together:

Ten Quick Tips for Family Reading

by Barbara Manthei
Governor's Office of Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Read aloud to your children every day. Whatever your child's age, this is the day to begin reading aloud.

Make reading time a loving, happy time of day. A child who associates reading with enjoyment will read for a lifetime.

Budget time to read together and make it a priority. Establish a routine that works for your family. For example, reading aloud at bedtime is a nice way to end the day.

Take your children to the library or bookmobile often. Give them time to browse and select books. Honor their selections, even if you think they are too difficult, too easy, or not worthwhile reading.

Read all kinds of things together. Read labels, billboards, catalogues, manuals, schedules, magazines, newspapers, and books.

If children are too involved in school activities and there is little time for them to visit the library, a family member can take turns checking out a variety of reading material for your home. It's all right not to read everything. You'll be providing a rotating library in your home.

Model the practical, economic value of reading to your children. Read recipes and prepare something together your family enjoys. Let your children have a role in assembling or repairing items around the house, helping you read directions or diagrams, or handing you tools.

Watch, listen, and build upon your children's interests. Do they like you to read them riddles and jokes, poems, books about cowboys or insects, or comic books? Be a resource for more of what they like and new things, too.

Read where you are. When travelling, waiting for appointments, on vacation, or at home on a rainy day, have books and magazines ready to read. Ask grandparents to have books available when you visit.

Encourage other families to read together. Share books and reading activities that your family has enjoyed. All children need someone to read to them.

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Reading Aloud to Older Children

It's Good for Them, Too!

by Barbara Manthei
Governor's Office of Literacy and Lifelong Learning

It's important to continue reading aloud to school-age children after they have learned to read—as important as providing them with food, clothing, and shelter. Here are a few reasons why:

- The listening vocabulary of school-age children is more advanced than their reading vocabulary. Reading aloud allows older children to continue to expand their vocabulary and background knowledge. Older children read aloud to will also have the privilege of enjoying a much greater variety of literature than they could without you!
- As with younger children, reading aloud is good for the curiosity and imagination of school-age children. It helps them to pay attention longer, think better, and communicate more effectively.
- Reading aloud to your child opens the door to some great conversations. It allows you, as a parent, to share thoughts and experiences, lets you know what your child's concerns and questions are, and can help bring you closer together.

Here are some tips for choosing read-aloud books that will interest your school-age child:

- Be sure to listen to the interests of your child. Some children would rather read factual information than a story. If they like to figure out how things work, look for books that explain the wonders of the physical world or engineering principles to young readers. Try a variety of story styles with your youngster to see what they prefer—simple stories, complex stories, or poetry.
- Try to schedule some time to read together or it may not happen! But spontaneous opportunities to read together are just as valuable. For example, if you come across something funny in your personal reading, share it with the family. Laugh about the daily newspaper comics, discuss weather-related incidents near and far, or read the sports pages together. Have fun reading together!
- Use a hobby to develop your child's reading interests. A stamp collection can lead to discussions and books about geography and history. A rock collection can spur your child to read about geology and the physical wonders of the world. Children who collect sports cards often amaze their families with the statistics they have memorized.
- Have a variety of reading materials in your home—science magazines, children's books, and classics for young people. Older children who want to relax with picture books or simple stories may have renewed appreciation or a different understanding of stories they read as pre-schoolers.
- Be sure to use the resources of your local public library! Children's librarians are wonderful sources of ideas for reading aloud to older children and are knowledgeable about current and traditional books. Many libraries provide reading and learning opportunities for school-age children, in addition to offering story hour for pre-schoolers. If your community doesn't have a public library, ask your school librarian to help you make good read-aloud choices.

Remember, children of all ages love to be read to. You are building a lifetime of memories, page by page.

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Take-Home Folders Inspire a Love of Reading

It's inexpensive. It's easy. And, most importantly, Minocqua Elementary School teacher Jan Degner's take-home folders invite the families of her kindergartners to help each child become a successful reader.

"School and home have to work together. Reading is the key to everything else. We need to base learning on what children know already and help them become successful students immediately," Degner said, explaining why she has used take-home folders for the past seven years with her kindergarten students.

During the first two weeks of school, Degner holds an evening meeting to help parents understand what will happen in kindergarten, show them the curriculum, and explain how take-home folders will work. Understanding how take-home folders will help reinforce at-home reading skills learned in the classroom is critical to effectively involving parents, so Degner videotapes the evening meeting for parents unable to attend.

"I show them the books we'll be using, even read a couple of them to parents, and tell parents that their children are already readers, whether or not they realize it. They read McDonald's signs, cereal boxes, pictures in books, and many, many other things," she said.

Degner uses early readers' series published by the Wright Company and the Rigby Com-pany, providing each child with her own copy. The books, which emphasize "rhyme, rhythm, and repetition," start out very simply and get more complex as the year progresses. Each child receives a simple, two-pocket folder decorated only by his name. Each folder contains one worksheet divided into two columns: one column for the name of the book and the date read, and another column for parents' comments.

Degner reads the book to children in class, then asks the children to tell her the story in their own words. Parents are asked to read the book with the child at home, talk about what they read, and write their comments in the appropriate column.

"I only want them to write *positive* comments about their reading experiences. Whatever they write, they must read to their child. It's meant to be fun and help each child gain a love of books," she added.

There is no minimum or maximum number of books parents and children should read together. Degner puts a sticker on the folder for each 12-entry sheet completed.

Parents have been extremely supportive of the program, she said, and appreciate the chance to consistently complement classroom learning at home. It takes about ten minutes to read a book and complete the book log. Parents of all educational backgrounds have been able to participate in the program.

Reading at home with a parent has made a long-lasting difference in how well the children learn in the classroom, Degner remarked. "Five or six first graders this year took the time to bring back some of their books from kindergarten last year. They handed them to me and said the books were for the 'new children' learning to read because they could read them already. It was neat to see how proud of themselves they were!"

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25 Ideas for Communicating the Curriculum to Families

Want to keep parents positive and enthusiastic about schools? Make sure families are informed in a variety of ways about what their children are learning throughout the school year.

One teacher starts each school day by reminding herself that the bright-eyed children filling her classroom don't come to school each day by themselves. They come with their family members "perched on their shoulders," with the voices, lessons, and hopes of their parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members resounding in their ears, brains, and hearts.

How many of the following ideas has your school done or even considered doing to ensure that families know and understand what their children are learning and how they can help? Schools with involved families are schools that enjoy support from families, rank higher on achievements tests, and report content, productive staff members. What have you got to lose?

- Invite new students and their families to a "Get Acquainted Hour" before school starts or early in the school year.
- Establish and publicize regular visitation days for family members to observe classes and a way for them to comment about their experiences.
- Schedule school open houses for one grade level at a time. Smaller groups give parents a better chance to get to know staff members and each other.
- Hold a start-of-the-year potluck supper for students and families by grade level or classroom, followed by a short school- or curriculum-related presentation. Food and families bring people together.
- Vary the times for open houses, holding some during the day and some at night, to allow all families to come.
- Organize special outreach efforts for waiting-to-be-reached families. The personal touch—telephone calls, home visits, and special invitations mailed to families in their own languages—will reap results.
- Try a few neighborhood coffees in parents' homes. Invite people in a neighborhood area to meet informally with the principal and one or two teachers to chat about the school and education issues.
- Advertise one evening a week when parents or students can visit with or telephone the principal to ask questions or discuss problems.
- Advertise a weekly or monthly time and telephone number when parents can call teachers during the day to ask questions or discuss their children's progress.
- Devote time at staff workshops to discuss skills for communicating with parents and ways to get feedback from them.

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- Set up a "family shelf" in the school library with materials parents can check out on child development, discipline, homework techniques, and learning styles.
- Is there a place for visiting parents and family members to hang their hats in your school? Designate space for a school family center in the school building where parents can talk with teachers, community groups can meet, and the lights and coffee machine are on!
- Suggest that parents shadow their students for a day to experience a typical day.
- Organize a parent-and-student field trip so they can learn together.
- Develop a "How Parents Can Help" handbook which offers practical suggestions for doing learning activities in the home and in the community, creating a learning-friendly home environment, and establishing good homework guidelines.
- Start a "Family Corner" in your school district newsletter that invites the PTA, PTO, or individual parents to talk about opportunities for them to get involved.
- Offer computer and family math night programs for parents and students to learn together.
- Videotape or publish short summaries of programs or presentations offered by your school for families so those unable to attend will still be able to learn from them.
- Offer learning-together opportunities that especially appeal to fathers, such as programs on the father-child relationship; making kitchen, science, music, or art projects; and gym or athletic activities.
- Involve parents in creating your own parent-teacher-student learning compact or agreement.
- Enclose a two-minute survey in report cards asking parents how well they think your school is helping children learn.
- Keep weekly school newsletters to one or two sides of a page on bright-colored paper so it can be read easily and quickly. Publish your school's goals for the year and leave a "clip 'n comment corner" for parents to jot down a thought or two about a featured school issue.
- Survey family members about hobbies or interests and schedule time for them to visit their child's class during the year to talk about that interest.
- Create opportunities for families to volunteer together—in a community drive for the local food pantry, cleaning up a park, or visiting those in need.
- Establish a "Families and Friends Program," bringing families from different neighborhoods or cultural backgrounds together at a school picnic and another time during the year to share food, conversation, and the joys of parenting.

Learning Together — Families in Education

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Tip Sheet for Teachers:

Communicating with Families to Help Their Children Succeed

Say Something Positive First

- Calling each family early in the school year, particularly in the elementary grades, and saying something positive starts your relationship with parents off on the right foot. That initial contact can help you enormously. Parents can give you information about their child that will be helpful in working with the child.
- If you can't call each family, try sending home a flyer with your photo, schedule, and short biography to introduce yourself to parents. Be sure to give telephone numbers where you can be reached; consider including your home phone number if appropriate.
- Stress your community ties and share your own experiences as a parent. If you attended the same schools or live in the community, let families know.

Respect Every Family

- When meeting with parents, smile and make eye contact with them. If you can, sit beside—not across from—the parent. Keep your sense of humor. Laughter can defuse some very tense situations.
- Avoid educational jargon, words like "pro-active" or "needs-based assessments," which most parents don't understand. Using jargon only widens the gap between you and those unfamiliar with it.
- Ask questions about the child's interests and family activities, but respect privacy if you sense resistance.
- Let families know that they are welcome to observe the class frequently, but that teacher and staff conferences require an appointment.

Work Through Problems

- Listen first. Sometimes parents and family members just need to talk through their anger. Try to remember that many parents work long days and worry a lot about their children.
- Acknowledge that being a parent is a difficult job. Try to remember that the child's performance in school is an important part, but only a part, of his or her life.
- If you expect trouble, try a team approach. Include the principal or assistant principal and counselor to help deal with particularly difficult situations and people. Make every effort to avoid putting the parent on the spot. Instead, try to include the parent as a partner in solving the problem.

Show Parents How Your School Works

- One of the best activities during back-to-school night or open house is a brief run-through of an actual school day, including teacher expectations for the year.
- Stress what students are expected to learn, as well as your rules for behavior and grades.
- Offer to explain test results, particularly on standardized or developmental tests. Many parents feel too embarrassed to ask questions, mistakenly assuming that everyone else can interpret the results.
- Spell out the rules clearly early in the school year and stick to them. Parents respect clear and fairly applied rules.

Source: Excerpted from *Helping Students Succeed: What Teachers and PSRPs (Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel) Can Do to Help Families Help Children Succeed*, American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001-2079; (202) 879-4400.

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Reflections on Parent Advisory Councils:

One Parent's Experience

by Jane Grinde, Team Leader
DPI Family-Community-School Partnerships

So your school has a parent advisory council? Is it a gathering of parents who bring energy, enthusiasm, and great ideas to the learning experience for your students, or is it another way for the principal to tell the few parents who attend what is happening in school?

Who comes to the advisory council meetings? Who knows about the meetings? Who sets the agendas? Who talks at the meetings? Who listens? Who follows up on concerns and issues raised? Who follows up on the great ideas brought forth?

As a veteran of parent advisory councils PreK to high school, I'd like to offer a few observations about some of my successful and not-so-successful experiences. I am currently the parent of three children in early elementary, middle, and high schools. My experience has taught me that parent participation takes **energy, time, and commitment**, and often produces real feelings of frustration.

Despite many years working for a state department of education in communications and family-school-community partnerships, my level of contribution as a parent seldom matches my expectation of what it should be. Just as parents and students bring different perspectives, needs, and interests to their roles, so too, the experiences of serving on councils will be varied.

For example, sometimes the knowledge, familiarity, and experience of veteran council members may unintentionally intimidate parents new to the group. Maybe it's my own guilt, but in the presence of some parents, I feel a little inadequate. These are the wonderful parents who volunteer regularly, know the routine, know the staff, and perhaps take for granted that other parents can be just as caring as they but aren't able to participate in similar ways. We need to remember that all parents' contributions are important, beginning with what we do at home with our children.

My first meetings of the middle and high school parent advisory councils were remarkably similar. I was late both times and knew only one or two of the 20-plus members. Most of the parents seemed to know each other.

So, there I was, feeling a little inadequate. But, if I felt that way, how many other parents with fewer resources and less experience felt worse? No wonder so few of us make it out of the home door and through the school door!

And, what efforts were made by me or others on the council to recruit the "waiting to be reached" parents, the parents who don't even know the school has an advisory council? The parents who don't have transportation? The parent who works an hourly job in the evening? The parent who doesn't feel welcome in the school, or doesn't even know where the school is?

My reasons for serving on a council are fairly simple. I want to learn more about my children's education, want to offer my ideas, and I want to be respected as a partner in the learning process. I also want convenient times and locations for the meeting. I want information, but don't want to be overwhelmed with too much information, nor with minor issues that take time away from the larger picture. I want to be able to talk without feeling I have to compete for the time to offer my opinion in a group of 20 or so people, most of whom I don't know.

Certainly, we don't want to discourage large groups, but if it is to be an advisory council, then make sure all get to talk and offer input. It's easy to break into small groups to deal with issues. It's more efficient to provide dot points or one-page summaries of programs before the meeting rather than have someone take precious time to explain a new program. The typical 90-minute meeting is a bigtime commitment for many participants, yet certainly not long enough to deal with the many important issues

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facing children's learning. Therefore, every effort must be made to use that time efficiently.

I have been at some advisory council meetings where most of the meeting was taken by reports from the principal and chairperson, with little time for discussion. It was great information, and I was glad I was there, but that same information could have been provided to all parents through the newsletter, voice mail, cable TV, or any other of a number of vehicles.

Just as the time of parents is precious so, too, is the principal's. Principals have far more meetings than they have time for, and they don't need to waste time talking *at* an advisory council. My parental advice to principals is:

- Use your staff and volunteers to develop information sheets on the issues you want discussed.
- Give information to the council ahead of time.
- Use technology—including the phone and computer—to supplement the council's meeting time.
- Tell council members about other meetings that they can attend to get information about programs that you would like feedback on.
- Ask parents for their advice and listen to hear new ideas and perspectives.

Council members want to feel they are contributing, and it doesn't do a thing for our self-esteem when we are talked *at* for most of the meeting and given no specific assignments.

Other suggestions for the care and nurturing of parent advisory councils:

- Use councils as *one* means to seek advice from parents on substantive issues; realizing that additional input may be needed.
- Make a concerted effort to get a diversity of perspectives (cultural, income, academic, working class, and so forth) on the parent advisory council.
- Don't expect that you have met your obligation to provide information to all parents by providing it only to the advisory council. Use the parent advisory council as one way to get information to parents, with the hope that they will share the information with others. Some will, some won't.
- Use the parent advisory council to recruit volunteers to serve on other committees, as well as to do other tasks.
- Use the parent advisory council to get feedback. Give them information prior to the meeting and ask them to react to it at the meeting. Break into small groups to give everyone a chance to talk.
- Periodically ask council members to make some phone calls to solicit input and poll other parents. Invite council members to other meetings; encourage them to attend school board meetings. Send them reminders about the parent advisory council. Give them a sense of ownership in something.
- Allow parents the flexibility to bring their children to the meeting. I have, on several occasions, taken one or more of my children to meetings. I strongly believe parents should not have to pay for child care to do volunteer work. Therefore, where possible, provide the option for bringing children to the meeting. Usually a corner in the meeting room is fine for the kids to sit and read a book or put together a puzzle. My expectation is that my child will behave and benefit from seeing me participate.
- Finally, listen to parents and respond with other than, "That's just the way we do things here," or "That's our policy," or "That's already been decided." Instead, try, "That's a perspective we hadn't thought about; how might we work together to improve what we are doing?"

Good luck and happy PAC-ing!

Sample

Responsibilities of grade level participants on the Verona Area High School Parent Advisory Council: to be actively involved at monthly PAC meetings, to assist in chairing or co-chairing committees as they are established; to be a participant on committees that increase opportunities for our students that do not involve alcohol and other drugs; to assist in improving opportunities for students to learn; and to interact and network with other parents on behalf of their student's education.

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High School Family-Community Partnerships Look **Different**!

Just as the parent-child relationship changes during the teen years, the needs and expectations for family-community-school partnerships at the high school level change—for students, families, and school staff. Maintaining the same level of personal interaction with six high school teachers that a parent had with her child's one elementary teacher may be impossible, as well as unnecessary.

Some things do not change. Families continue to teach their high school-aged children many valued attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and skills. Although most parents of high schoolers cannot and do not participate at the school building as volunteers and decision makers, 80 percent of parents surveyed said they do want to know *how to help* their children succeed at home and *what to do* to help their children succeed at school.

Parents surveyed by Joyce Epstein and Lori Connors at the Center for Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning said they especially want more information from their child's high school about

- adolescent development,
- what and how well students are learning,
- planning for the student's future, and
- monitoring and assisting with homework.

Paul Spies, president of the newly formed Wisconsin High School Association, has taught at four Wisconsin and Illinois high schools. He offered his observations about "what works" for family involvement practices in high schools.

Create Realistic Expectations for Teachers

To make contact with students' families "manageable" for teachers, create interdisciplinary learning teams which allow teachers from the core disciplines to teach, know personally, and act as advocates for smaller numbers of students.

Even though Spies' school of 3,000 had an incoming class of 900 freshmen students, his interdisciplinary team was responsible for only 125 students. That meant each teacher had to make about 30 telephone calls at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves to parents, a task they were able to do because the numbers weren't overwhelming.

For one teacher to personally contact the fami-lies of his or her average daily student load—100 to 130—is a gargantuan task. For families to get telephone calls from the five or six teachers who their son or daughter sees each day might also be confusing. But parents who know the face and telephone number of one teacher to address questions or concerns are parents equipped with a useful "tool" to monitor and participate in their child's learning.

Parents are "pleasantly surprised" when they get a phone call from a high school teacher at the start of the year, Spies said. Some parents say they feel less intimidated about showing interest in their child's high school education because a welcome has been extended.

Make School Open House Night an Occasion

Yes, Open House Night is a popular and useful way for families to meet high school teachers and learn about mutual expectations for the student. Some schools go a step further in making it easier for parents and teachers to meet by holding School Open House Night in one large, accessible location—the school gym, for example. Staff gather around easy-to-identify stations by subject or discipline or alphabetically and talk with parents as they circulate around the room.

Here's what else schools are doing:

- incorporating parenting tips, the school district's family involvement policy, and the school's mission into an Open House Night talk by the principal.

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• videotaping the proceedings for parents not able to attend.
• kicking off the session with a barbecue or potluck supper, giving parents and teachers a chance to mingle informally. This can be done by classroom, for families of the new freshman class, or the whole school.
• circulating volunteer sign-up forms during the open house. Interest in volunteering to help students in reading, computer, or other study laboratories will be greater in high schools.
• inviting your school's parent group and community organizations and agencies to set up exhibits or distribute information.

Ask, Listen, and Act

Whether it's a formal survey or during a one-on-one conversation, school staff pay parents a great compliment when they ask parents' opinions about how well they think the school is working for their child, take time to listen to their responses, and then act to meet the needs they hear about.

"In order to connect with the community, schools have to be communities," Spies said. This means reaching out in a variety of ways to parents who may normally be reluctant to come to the school building, including
• bringing together parents with similar interests, cultural backgrounds, or by neighborhood, including an Hispanic Parent Alliance or an Afro-American Parent Alliance. Ask alliance members to gather information—anecdotally or in writing—and serve as representatives for other parents.
• gathering family "focus groups" with a distinct purpose and limited time demands to respond to curricular, planning, or community issues. Avoid using "token" parents on school or staff committees. One or two parents on a committee of 20 teachers cannot adequately represent the needs and opinions of parents not at the meeting. If you can't increase the number of family members willing to serve on those committees, provide a means for families to offer their comments at numerous key points in the planning process.

WHSA, created in 1996, provides a network for educators and others to share experiences and to promote successful high school practices and to share experiences. It is affiliated with the National High School Association, headquartered in Irvine, CA. For more information about membership or about the organization, please contact Paul Spies, WHSA President, 2931 S. 57th St., Milwaukee, WI 53219, call (414) 327-1581, or e-mail paulspies@aol.com.

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Schools Where Family-School-Community Partnerships Flourish

Characteristics of a Partnership School

Collaboration between teachers, administra-tors, families, and communities has become commonplace. Most schools, for example, offer some type of parent volunteer program, a school open house, parent-teacher conferences, newsletter for parents, and a fund-raising parent group. In addition to traditional involvement, however, schools are devising many new opportunities to work with families and the community to help each other and to improve the school.

Why have some schools been able to make partnership practices an integral part of the school's culture, while others continue with lower or traditional levels of family and community involvement? Don Davies, co-director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, has found several common characteristics among the "breakthrough schools" that live and breathe family-community partnerships.

These are the factors that partnership schools share:

Principal and teacher leadership. Principals and at least some teachers are willing to lead and take risks. They understand the meaning of shared responsibility for children's learning and well-being. They have learned that the school alone simply can't do the job of helping all children succeed. They understand that partnership means reciprocity—that the school exchanges information, services, support, and benefits with its families and communities.

Diverse opportunities. The school provides a varied menu of opportunities for participation geared to the diverse needs of families and their children and to the particular conditions of each school and school district. Partnerships are integrated with the mainstream activities and programs of the schools.

Outside help. The school usually has sought an outside agent to serve as the catalyst and facilitator of change. Outside help takes many forms, including taking advantage of federal programs such as Goals 2000 or the Drug-Free Schools Act; or an interested university, or a federally-funded research and development center. Outside help usually has two crucial components: discretionary money (often very small amounts, as little as $5,000); and the presence of an outside facilitator, or consultant, on a continuing basis.

Ways to welcome families. The schools have a structure and focus to help families feel welcome. A family or parent center is a low-cost, easy-to-manage method to make schools more hospitable to families and to plan and carry out a wide variety of family and community activities. The center sends a message that families are welcome in the schools.

Learning at home. Learning does not stop at the schoolhouse door. The school helps families do what nearly all of them want to do anyway—increase their children's academic success. Teachers help families set realistic expectations, monitor and help with homework, select appropriate books and learning materials, support the school's academic priorities, and use home learning materials. The school negotiates increased access to community resources, including reduced fees at museums and cultural events, family reading programs in libraries, increased access to college facilities and courses, and tutoring and mentoring programs in businesses and corporations.

Multiple approaches to communicating. The school uses varied and imaginative forms of communication. The more informed families are about the schools and their own children's social and academic progress, the better able they are to participate effec-

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tively. Access to information enables family members to successfully support learning and school improvement.

Preparation for working collaboratively. Administrators, teachers, families, and other community members have made special efforts to learn how to work together well. Among the skills to be learned or improved upon include talking and listening across cultures and educational boundaries, negotiating, strategic planning, interview techniques, planning and chairing meetings, having productive parent-teacher conferences, and building consensus about the ends and means of education.

Personnel policies that promote partnerships. The school's policies and practices for selecting, evaluating, rewarding, and promoting staff members reflect a commitment to building partnerships with families and community agencies and institutions. Involving family and community members in interviewing teacher candidates and selecting a principal help assure that family and community perspectives are considered. The school respects teachers' time and makes time available for them to meet with parents.

Shared decision making. The school sees families as partners and not simply as clients or customers. Parents are involved in governance and decision-making processes, including decisions about budgets, school programs, and personnel. Parents are more than tokens. The school pays attention to some of the essential elements of the democratic process, including recognizing different interests; respecting all participants regardless of color, religion, or educational status; respecting minority viewpoints; and using conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and compromise. From the start, the school brings together teachers and other staff, families, students, and the community to plan, and then collaborates to achieve those plans.

Family and student support. The school recognizes that it benefits when comprehensive health and social services are offered to children and their families, since the school's educational mission cannot be fulfilled when children are sick, hungry, or emotionally disturbed, or when serious unmet health and social service needs interfere with a family's ability to care for its children. There is convincing evidence that good programs in a school that provide health and social services can help increase student achievement, save money, and reduce overlapping services, reach those children and families most in need, increase community support for the school, and help at-risk families develop the capacity to manage their own lives successfully.

Written policies. The school's written policies set guidelines and requirements for collaboration. The policies provide a politically sanctioned framework for action at the school and community levels. Policies are backed up by staff and money.

Problem-solving mechanisms. The school uses an action team to improve working relationships between participants in a partnership, to gather information about school and community problems, and to help solve those problems.

Summary. School board members, superintendents, central-office staff, principals, parents, and community leaders need to offer assertive leadership to create schools in which family-school-community partnerships flourish. Both leadership from the inside and increased demand from the outside can help make these schools the rule rather than the exception.

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Get Organized!

Leadership Steps for Schools and Districts

Okay, you've done a nice job of reaching out to families and community members for a few years now. Lots of parents come to open house night and parent-teacher conferences, support your school's student performances, attend the annual multicultural fair, and raise funds for special programs. Isn't that enough? What else is there?

Come on, admit it. In your dream of dreams, you'd like to claim that *every one* of your students' families showed up several times a year for school programs, and that *every child* had someone in the family who read to him or her and kept track of what homework assignments were getting done daily.

You'd like student achievement to be steadily increasing and for every family to feel well-informed and a critical part of what their child was learning at school. You'd like parents and grandparents to go out into the community and talk about how *wonderful* things are in your school for their children and for them.

It doesn't have to be a dream. In fact, many schools are on the road to realizing this scenario because they have a plan in mind about how to get there. Following are some actions and some questions your school or district may want to pursue as you "get organized" with your family-community-school partnership efforts.

Steps to Take

Write a policy that identifies district- or school-level goals for family-community-school partnerships, including the six types of involvement (parenting and family skills, two-way communications, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and community outreach). Make sure families and community members have lots of opportunities to shape your policy, and include what your district's commitments to carrying out the policy will be.

See the three sample policies included in the article, "Family-School Partnerships: Make It Board Policy!" in this issue.

Assign a coordinator who will oversee the school's or district's work and assist your school with its plans to develop partnerships. Provide adequate staff and resources to do the work on partnerships. This work includes training an Action Team from each school to develop strong, positive partnership practices that include the six types of involvement.

Form an Action Team at each school to devise plans that involve *all* families in their children's education. Link partnership plans directly to the goals and objectives of school improvement plans. Make sure the Action Team has equal numbers of parents and staff, as well as administrators from every level.

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Conduct an annual conference or event to enable teachers, families, Action Teams, and others to share ideas, discuss progress, solve problems, and plan ahead.

Provide funding and recognition programs for schools. Offer small grants for special projects, a small budget to cover Action Team costs, and other support. Make sure those volunteering their time and effort feel appreciated!

Offer in-service education for teachers, administrators, and families on goals, practices, and processes of partnerships. Make it practical, results-oriented, and full of stories and suggestions from those representing all facets of your school and community.

Create vehicles for communicating effective, new ideas to your schools. Whether it is a clearinghouse, a newsletter, or other communications, make it easily accessible and understandable to all of those carrying out family-school partnership efforts.

Support research and evaluation efforts in your district to learn which practices help schools produce specific results for students, parents, teachers, the school, and others. It may be as informal as personal anecdotes or as formal as published materials from research institutions or your Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Family-Community-School Partnership program.

Questions to Ask

- Which practices of partnership are presently strong at each grade level? Which are weak? Which should continue? Expand? Be dropped? Be added?
- Are practices coordinated or fragmented? How are families of children in bilingual, Title 1, special education, and other programs part of a whole-school partnership effort?
- How are your students succeeding on measures of achievement, attitude, attendance, and homework completion? Which partnership practices would specifically help students move toward those goals?
- Which families are you reaching and which ones aren't you reaching? Who are the families most difficult to involve and how might they be included to meet their needs?
- What do *teachers* expect of families? What do *families* expect of teachers and others at school?
- What do students expect their families to do to help them with school life and homework? What do students want their schools to do to inform and involve their families?
- How do you want your program of family-community-school partnerships to look three years from now?

Adapted from the *Partnership-2000 Schools Manual, 1996*, published by the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University.

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Family-School Partnerships:

Make It Board Policy!

Does your school district have a family involvement policy that outlines how parents and family members can expect to be welcomed and involved as partners in the education of their children? Here are three samples that include what commitments the school board will make to enact family partnerships and help parents understand it.

Be sure that parents and other family and community members are included in developing your policy. Or, use an action research approach that actively solicits families' opinions, needs, and efforts before and after the policy is written. Their ideas and perspectives will make your policy much more effective and meaningful. Feel free to draw upon these sample policies as resources in creating your own district family-school partnership policy.

Sample #1

The following statements regarding family involvement were excerpted from those approved Nov. 23, 1992, by the Milwaukee School Board.

- The _____ School Board acknowledges, affirms, and embraces families as the first and foremost educators of their children.
- The _____ School Board commits to providing the resources and support needed to increase family knowledge, access, accountability, and decision making.
- The _____ School Board recognizes that the needs and interests of families must be central to achieving school and district goals.
- The _____ School Board is committed to respect for and empowerment of all parents and families.
- The _____ School Board is committed to eliminating barriers to family-school partnerships.
- The _____ School Board commits to providing the staff and financial resources for a Family Center. The center will serve all parents and families as a point of access for information about parenting skills, learning-at-home techniques, volunteering opportunities, decision-making opportunities, meeting space, and resources available for families in the community.
- The _____ School Board commits to establishing a Parent-Teacher Association in each school, with the organizational format being determined by parents.
- The _____ School Board commits to broadening family partnerships in the development of all policies, plans, and procedures that affect the education of children in this district.
- The _____ School Board acknowledges that parents and families have a right to advocate for their children and be accorded respect by all school district employees.
- The _____ School Board commits to the creation of written, formalized procedures to resolve parent and family concerns and complaints.

Sample #2

This policy is adapted from one enacted by the Tacoma (Washington) School District.

School personnel will be at their schools and available to meet with students, parents, and other family members at least 30 minutes before classes start in the morning and at least 30 minutes after school closes in the afternoon, unless a different time has been arranged.

The school board believes that a child's education is enhanced by a close partnership between the home, the school, and the community. The _____ School District will encourage student achievement by providing a range of opportunities for learning and increasing parenting skills that encourage student achievement.

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Parents and families are expected to be involved in their children's education. Each student's family will be expected to dedicate at least 20 hours a year of volunteer time to their children's school(s). In addition, it is the district's goal that parents and families will encourage and participate in their children's academic success. Families should emphasize the importance of students attending school each day, completing homework assignments, valuing education, and following through with suitable learning activities at home.

Families must have a variety of opportunities to work with the schools. The _____ School District will provide these opportunities through many means by including, but not limited to, personal contacts by staff members, decision making on school committees, volunteering, parent-teacher conferences and open houses, written communications of many kinds, and workshops for families.

A special effort will be made to reach out to families whose primary language is not English, single-parent families, families in cultural transition, and others whose conditions make it difficult to participate in their children's education.

Sample #3

This two-part Parent Involvement Policy Statement is used by the San Diego City Schools.

The Board of Education recognizes the necessity and value of parent involvement to support student success and academic achievement. In order to assure collaborative partnerships between parents and schools, the board, working through the administration, is committed to

- involving parents as partners in school governance, including shared decision making.
- establishing effective two-way communication with all parents, respecting the diversity and differing needs of families.
- developing strategies and programmatic structures at schools to enable parents to participate actively in their children's education.
- providing support and coordination for school staff and parents to implement and sustain appropriate parent involvement from kindergarten through grade 12.
- utilizing schools to connect students and families with community resources that provide educational enrichment and support.

What Does the Policy Mean?

The policy means that

- Parent involvement is recognized as one school improvement strategy that increases student achievement.
- Schools should develop a comprehensive home-school partnership process that provides many ways for parents and school staff to collaborate as:
  — communicators of their ideas and concerns;
  — supporters of children and the schools;
  — learners about school programs, family cultures, children's progress;
  — teachers of children and of each other; and
  — advisors, advocates, and decision makers.
- School and teacher attitudes and actions affect the level and type of parent involvement.
- The Board of Education and district administration are committed to supporting school site efforts and actions.
- District resources will be organized and distributed in ways that enhance school site programs.
- Training and support must be provided to parents and school staff to help each group acquire the unique and common skills needed to develop a partnership.
- Schools should link school and community resources in ways that will better meet the needs of families.

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National Groups Commit to Family/School Partnership Statement

A broad coalition of business, community, faith, educational, and parent organizations called the "Partnership Family School Steering Group" has been developed to support U.S. Education Secretary Riley's initiative for AMERICA GOES BACK TO SCHOOL: GET INVOLVED! The partnership has prepared both a "Family/School Partnership Mission Statement" and a "Family/School Partnership Promise" which signifies the commitment of each organization and school as active members of the partnership for family involvement in education.

At a kick-off ceremony at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., on September 17, 1996, Council of Chief State School Officers Executive Director Gordon M. Ambach joined Secretary Riley, National PTA President Joan Dykstra (formerly from Wisconsin), Anne Bryant of the National School Boards Association, Paul Houston of the American Association of School Administrators, Joe McTighe of the Council for the Advancement of Private Education, Marilyn Aklin of the National Coalition of Title I Parents, and representatives of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and many other organizations.

The mission statement reads:

The Family-School Partnership Mission Statement

Families have a vital and enduring role in the education of their children. Home is the first place where learning occurs, and the family—parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, guardians, extended family members, and other caring adults—is the first and primary teacher of children.

As representatives and partners in children's formal education, we believe that it is vital for all the adults involved in children's learning to join together. As representatives of families, local school board governance, administration, teachers, and school staff, we will involve ourselves in every aspect of the learning process and do whatever we can to ensure that families are part of and involved in the learning process.

In our increasingly complex world, neither families nor schools can accomplish this mission by themselves. The role of community and religious organizations and local employers is critically important in the total equation of educating the citizens of the twenty-first century. Partnership on behalf of America's children is a priority.

We believe in building and promoting mutual trust and respect between families and schools, and also between the school and the community at large. Our nation depends upon a shared concern for the education of young people. As representatives of families and schools, we are committed to work together to improve children's learning through family involvement partnerships, and we invite each school to join us and sign the Family-School Partnership Promise.

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Signatories include:

- American Association of School Administrators
- American Federation of Teachers
- Council for American Private Education
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
- National Coalition of Title I/Chapter 1 Parents
- National Education Association
- National PTA
- National School Boards Association

Following is the Family-School Partnership Promise being circulated throughout schools and communities as part of the same initiative. Will your community sign it?

For more information, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

The Family-School Partnership Promise

Families and schools across America are increasingly accepting mutual responsi-bility for children's learning. When families are involved in children's learning, at school and at home, schools work better and students learn more. Schools and families are working with employers and community organizations to develop local partnerships that support a safe school environment where students learn to challenging standards. By working together, exchanging information, sharing decision making, and collaborating in children's learning, everyone can contribute to the education process.

Coming together as families, local school board governance, administration, teachers, and school staff, we form this partnership and affirm the importance of family involvement in children's learning. We pledge to:

- Share responsibility at school and at home to give students a better education and a good start in life.
- Our school will be welcoming to families, reach out to families before problems arise, offer challenging courses, create safe and drug-free learning environments, organize tutoring and other opportunities to improve student learning, and support families to be included in the school decision-making process.
- Our families will monitor student attendance, homework completion, and television watching; take the time to talk with and listen to their children; become acquainted with teachers, administrators, and school staff; read with younger children and share a good book with a teen; volunteer in school when possible; and participate in the school decision-making process.
- Promote effective two-way communication between families and schools, by schools reducing educational jargon and breaking down cultural and language barriers, and by families staying in touch with the school.
- Provide opportunities for families to learn how to help their children succeed in school and for school staff to work with families.
- Support family-school efforts to improve student learning by reviewing progress regularly and strengthening cooperative actions.

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Connecting Immigrant Parents and Schools

Immigrant parents continue as a largely untapped resource in their children's schooling, despite overwhelming evidence that parent participation can lead to a significant improvement in student achievement, more positive attitudes toward school, and stronger parent/teacher relationships.

Among the factors responsible for limited participation in school activities by immigrant parents are: language barriers, cultural conflicts, lack of transportation, long working hours, and limited knowledge of the U.S. public education system.

Many efforts to involve parents in their children's schooling fail because they lack a comprehensive approach, a strong commitment from school officials, and proper planning and implementation. Education research and practical experience suggest a variety of strategies to build and maintain effective partnerships between immigrant parents and schools.

Identify and Address Needs

Provide native-language orientation to inform immigrant parents about the U.S. school system, the legal rights of students, education services and programs offered by the school, extracurricular activities, and student evaluation and assessment procedures.

Identify needs, concerns, and expectations of immigrant parents through dialogue between parents, teachers, and support service personnel using phone calls, home visits, parent/teacher conferences, and informal surveys. Use bilingual/bicultural school staff to facilitate this process.

Place a priority on responding to parents' needs by designating a committee to take on this endeavor. This committee could be part of an existing organization such as a parent council, a home/school council, or the PTA.

Develop parent support networks using trained parents and community members to promote parent-to-parent communication.

Develop Effective Partnerships

Put policies in writing to legitimize the importance of parent involvement and help frame the context for program activities by explicitly spelling out to all participants what they are empowered to do.

Provide strong administrative support with ade-quate funding, support resources such as meeting places and computers, and designation of school personnel to help carry out the program.

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Stress a partnership approach with an emphasis on joint planning, goal setting, definition of roles, program assessment, development of instructional efforts, and setting of school standards.

Promote two-way communication requiring frequent contacts between school and home to allow parents to feel comfortable coming to school to voice concerns and share ideas. School staff should welcome parent input and use it to fashion relevant learning activities.

Evaluate parent involvement programs at key stages, as well as at the conclusion of a cycle or phase, to make program revisions on a continuous basis.

Promote Collaboration

Provide the necessary training to parents and school staff on partnering skills to ensure that parents are able to participate actively in all aspects of school life. Training must address language barriers and cultural differences between parents and school staff. Use community resources to assist with this training.

Develop numerous, non-threatening participatory opportunities for parents, such as becoming paid or volunteer teacher aides, visiting classrooms, attending discussion sessions on education issues, organizing multicultural and other school events, and having an active role in school governance and decision making. Numerous and varied activities offer multiple entry points for parents with differing interests, time constraints, skills, and confidence levels.

Facilitate parent participation in school events by distributing all written materials in the parents' home language, and by providing child care and transportation.

From *Mobilization for Equity*, March 1996, a publication of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 100 Boylston St., Ste. 737, Boston, MA 02116-4610.

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TIPS Program Links Families to Learning:

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork

Considering that many parents want more information about what their children are doing in school, the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) program offers great possibilities.

TIPS homework is the responsibility of the students. It requires interaction with a family member (a neighbor is acceptable) about something that is really interesting and enables students to share with parents things they are learning in class.

> TIPS are homework assignments that require students to talk to someone at home about something interesting they are learning in class.

Prototype materials for various subject areas have been prepared for kindergarten and the elementary and middle school grades through the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Funding for development came from a number of sources, including private foundations and the federal government.

TIPS helps solve some important problems with homework:

- It helps all families become involved, not just the few who know how to discuss math or science or other subjects.
- It makes homework the students' responsibility and does not ask parents to "teach" subjects or skills that they are not prepared to teach.
- It asks students to share and enjoy their work, ideas, and progress with their families.
- It allows families to comment and request other information from teachers in a section for home-to-school communication.

With TIPS, homework becomes a three-way partnership involving students, families, and teachers.

The amount of time required for sharing the homework with family varies. Some may take only ten minutes; some assignments may take more than an hour. Some teachers may want to assign the task weekly, while others may start with monthly assignments; however, the time allowed for completing the assignment should always be more than one evening.

Evaluation of TIPS usage has shown that families appreciate the efforts of teachers to keep them informed and involved. The results show that TIPS activities keep school on the agenda at home so that children know that their families believe schoolwork is important and worth talking about.

Students need as much guidance as parents about how to keep their families aware of and involved in the work they do in school. Over time, as TIPS is used each year, students get the idea that their teachers want their families to know about what they are learning and to participate in homework.

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The TIPS activities are two pages so they can be copied back to front. Each activity begins with a message to the parent or guardian on the purpose of the assignment. For example, an activity on "Writing a Paragraph—A Favorite Activity" begins:

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are learning how to write an interesting paragraph. I hope you enjoy this activity with me. This assignment is due _____.

Sincerely,

_____

The objective is noted next. "To write a clear paragraph about a favorite activity of a family member."

The procedure outlines what to do. In this case, it starts with the instructions to "interview your family member" and lists questions to ask. Following the interview, the student uses the space provided (eight lines) to write the first draft of the paragraph. The student is told to answer who, what, when, where, and why in that paragraph.

Step 3 asks the student to read the paragraph aloud to the family member and fix anything that is unclear, as well as to check and correct grammar errors.

Steps 4 and 5 ask the student to rewrite the paragraph with the corrections and reread it to the family member.

Following the completion of the task, the student is asked to discuss the project with the family member, and specific questions are provided.

The last section is a "Home-to-School Communication" which asks the adult three questions which can be answered with yes or no. They are:

- My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.
- My child and I enjoyed the activity.
- This assignment helped me to know what my child is learning in language arts.

Space is also provided for comments and the signature of the participating family member.

An example of a take-home science assignment focuses on graphing data. Materi-als needed are listed, in this case a pencil or crayon, and two coins. The student tells the family member what he or she knows about graphs prior to starting the task of collecting and recording data on the coin tosses. Following the task, the student is expected to talk with the family member about the project, using questions provided, and the family member has a chance to provide input.

Prototype activities have been prepared in most of the core areas for grades kindergarten through 8. They are easily photocopied or adaptable. They also provide wonderful ideas for science fair projects, summer do-at-home projects, and enrichment activities for the students who need or want to do more.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Family-School-Community Part-nership Team has a set of some of the prototypes and is willing to share a sample of them. They can also be ordered from Publications, Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218, telephone: (410) 516-8808. Cost ranges from $4 to $8 for a set, which includes 20 or more activities for a subject and grade area.

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The Call for Character Education:

"We Become What We Say"

There are four basic values that nearly every-one agrees children should have: courage, hon-esty, respect, and responsibility. These are the four core values that State Superintendent John Benson's Citizenship Initiative Task Force has recommended as essential to every child's school, home, and community experiences. Following a series of community forums early in 1996, the Citizenship Task Force met in June and July as a way to support families and schools as they foster citizenship values in students.

The task force, chaired by Senator Rick Grobschmidt and United Way of Dane County's Sharon Martin, first developed a set of underlying principles:

- There is a core set of citizenship values essential to our democratic society.
- The family, school, and community all have a role in fostering citizenship values in children.
- Values are shaped directly and indirectly, and are the result of the child's total experiences.

The final task force report recommends that each Wisconsin community discuss and develop its own set of core values.

B. David Brooks, president of the Jefferson Center for Character Education and a nationally-known author and speaker on character education, congratulated Benson during a speech at the 1996 Fall Conference for District Administrators for his progressive efforts to promote citizenship values in schools statewide. He encouraged administrators to use a five-step process to teach children core values and added that schools must also *show* students how to enact those values in everyday life.

Effective character education programs, he said, teach K-12 students how to make good decisions. "Many kids don't have the ability to make ethical decisions. They know more about how to solve a problem with violence than with negotiations, talking, or humor." Brooks attributed much of that tendency to the violence that young people view daily on television.

Step 1

Schools should compose their own list of essential, core values for students with the consensus and support of families and community members. While courage, honesty, respect, and responsibility are most likely to be on just about everyone's list, Brooks said some communities have difficulty agreeing on "tolerance" and other values because of differences in how they are defined.

Step 2

Schools must have a *process* for instilling values and decision making in students preschool through grade 12. Brooks advocates what he calls the "ABCs of behavior": **A**lternatives, **B**ehavior, and **C**onsequences. Many young people don't understand that there are alternatives and consequences to acting irresponsibly for themselves and others, he said.

Step 3

Students must be encouraged to *act* responsibly, respectfully, honestly, and courageously. That happens when teachers and administrators model character in teachers' lounges, offices, and hallways, and when exemplary behavior by students and others is recognized by the school. "We need to support good behavior as well as bad. We need to make sure students know what we expect of them and advertise what we want kids to be," Brooks said.

He cited one school whose faculty agreed to simply say, "We don't talk that way here," to students using profanity instead of confronting or ignoring them. In a matter of weeks teachers noticed a significant decrease in profanity. Students took it upon

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themselves to say, "We don't talk that way here," to fellow students using profanity.

Step 4

Schools should teach young people how to review their behavior. Teachers and parents need to change the question, "*Why* should you be courageous?" to "*What are you doing* to be courageous?" Many young people have never been taught how to apply principles to personal actions in everyday life, Brooks said.

He cited one fourth-grade class' list of how they were going to be courageous. They were going to try something they'd never tried before, raise their hands when they weren't really sure they knew the right answer, and be nice to children who were teased by others.

Step 5

Practice! This most important step is often the one most frequently missing, Brooks said. Whether you are in math class or on the golf course, practice in applying principles is what helps you be the way you want to be.

What is character education? Brooks defined it as systematic and up-front: "We've got to be able to see it and count it. It's too late to start teaching values in grade 11," he noted. "It has to be in their eyes and ears every day from preschool through grade 12." Character education also encourages students to be better students by being punctual, polite, and completing homework.

- language-based: Language leads to attitude and attitude leads to behavior. "We become what we say," Brooks noted. "We're not asking teachers to become parents, counselors, priests, or rabbis, but to do what they do best—teach."
- not just about the school, but about families and the community: Involve everyone in devising the list of core values and in spreading the word about how to implement them. Schools can use Drug-Free Schools, School-to-Work, and Title 1 monies to support efforts to train teachers in character education. The PTA and Kiwanis are national groups that have a special interest in character education initiatives, he said.

Some schools have launched campaigns to spread character education in the school and community by creating monthly themes, asking students and teachers to develop short scenarios, and using 15 minutes of homeroom time weekly to talk about that week's theme or case study. One school developed a CPA, or Character Point Average, to subjectively grade students on how well they carried out four designated values: respect, responsibility, cooperation, and work ethic. That school tied character education closely to its school-to-work efforts.

Brooks said he counters questions of *whose* values are being taught to children by changing the question to *what* values. "Do you want your children *not* to know about being honest, respectful, responsible, or courageous?" he asked. "There are standard core values. The value-free school got us where we are today—in trouble. We need to teach our kids to be good and it's a job for all of us."

Dr. Brooks has written or supervised the writing of character education curriculum now being used in over 60,000 classrooms nationwide and in Japan, Canada, and Columbia. He is the author of the book, *The Case for Character Education*, and, as a founding member of the board of directors of the Character Education Partnership based in Washington, D.C., has appeared on "Good Morning America," "20/20," ABC's "American Agenda," and many other national programs.

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Resources for Family-Community-School Partnerships

The state and national organizations listed be-low provide a variety of support, services, re-sources, and advocacy roles either directly or indirectly related to children, their families, and education.

Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning
Johns Hopkins University
3305 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8800

Children's Defense Fund
25 E St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
Legislative hotline: (202) 662-3678
Fax: (202) 662-3540
Web site: http://www.tmn.com/cdf/index.html
E-mail: HN3208@handsnet.org
Publication: CDF Reports, monthly, $29.95

Corporation for National and Community Service
1201 New York Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20525
(202) 606-5000

Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Ste. 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
(202) 336-7033

Families and Work Institute
330 Seventh Ave., 14th Floor
New York, NY 10001-5010
(212) 465-2044

Family Involvement Partnership for Learning
U.S. Dept. of Education
(800) USA-LEARN

Family-School-Community Partnerships
Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, WI 53707-7841
Jane Grinde: (608) 266-9356;
e-mail: grindjl@mail.state.wi.us
Ruth Anne Landsverk: (608) 266-9757;
e-mail: landsra@mail.state.wi.us
Web site: http://www.state.wi.us/agencies/dpi

Harvard Family Research Project
38 Concord Ave.
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-9108
Fax: (617) 495-8594
Web site: http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp

Home and School Institute
1201 16th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-3633

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

National Assn. for the Education of Young Children
Public Affairs Division
1509 16th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1426
(800) 424-2460
Fax: (202) 986-9706
E-mail: AAUJ82A@prodigy.com

National Assn. of Partners in Education
901 N. Pitt St., Ste. 320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

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National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
119 N. Payne St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-6232

National Coalition of Title I Parents
9th and D Sts., N.E.
Washington, DC 20002

National Committee for Citizens in Education
10840 Little Patuxent Pkwy., Ste. 301
Columbia, MD 21044-3199
(301) 977-9300 or 1 (800) NETWORK (638-9675)

National Community Education Assn.
3929 Old Lee Hwy.
Fairfax, VA 22030
(703) 359-8973
Fax: (703) 359-0972

National Education Goals Panel
1255 22nd St., N.W., Ste. 502
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 632-0952
Fax: (202) 632-0957

National Head Start Assn.
1651 Prince St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-0875 (information)
(800) 687-5044 (to order publications)
Web site: http://www.nhsa.org
Sustaining membership costs $30

National Parent Information Network
Project of the ERIC system
(800) 583-4135
Web site: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.educ/npin/npinhome.html

National PTA
330 N. Wabash Ave., Ste. 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
(312) 670-6783
Web site: http://www.pta.org

National School Public Relations Assn.
1501 Lee Hwy., Ste. 201
Arlington, VA 22209
(703) 528-5840

National School Volunteer Program
701 N. Fairfax St., Ste. 320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

The Parent Institute
P.O. Box 7474
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
(703) 323-9170
Orders: (800) 756-5525

Parent Involvement Center
Chapter 1 Technical Assistance Center
RMC Research Corp.
400 Lafayette Rd.
Hampton, NH 03842

Partnership–2000 Schools Network
Johns Hopkins University
3905 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8800
Fax: (410) 516-8890

University of Wisconsin–Extension Family Living
637 Extension Bldg.
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 263-1095

The Wisconsin Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA)
4797 Hayes Rd., Ste. 2
Madison, WI 53704-3256
(608) 244-1455

Wisconsin Intergenerational Network (WIN)
P.O. Box 5171
Madison, WI 53705-0171
(608) 238-7936

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SIX TYPES OF FAMILY—COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Parenting—Build on parenting strengths and help families improve parenting skills. Facilitate support systems and networks to enable families to effectively nurture their children.

Communicating—Design and implement effective two-way communication practices to reach families, both individually and collectively. These practices should ensure that families and school staff communicate back and forth about their children.

Learning at Home—Provide for families and school staff to work together in developing learning goals and offering opportunities for learning activities at home and in the community to meet the goals.

Volunteering—Recruit and organize volunteer participation from families and the community at-large.

Decision Making—Design governance structure through which parents are partners in policy decisions so that families have opportunities to give their opinions and to participate in decision making about school programs. Recruit families to act as advocates and decision makers and represent other parents and families.

Community Outreach—Establish partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community.

**Based on the research of Joyce Epstein, co-director, Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning, John Hopkins University. Implementation through the League of Schools Reaching Out, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston.*

GETTING IT DONE

Leadership—Who is in charge and has the authority to organize and assign tasks? One person should be accountable for the results.

Analysis—What are the needs and challenges? What results do you want? Develop a basis for your efforts.

Planning and Policy Development—What must be done? How? Who will do it? What is the time line? School board policy and district and school procedures may need to be developed.

Action/Implementation—With the groundwork laid, how much of the plan can you put in place? While the six types of family-community participation for schools are interrelated and important for a comprehensive approach, determine what is possible and practical at any given time. Don't delay doing something because the whole plan is not in place.

Evaluation—What worked? What didn't? What needs changing or fine tuning? Listen and learn from experiences.

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A Checklist for Schools

Making Your Family-Community Partnership Work

Following are examples of practices and programs that schools and districts can use to encourage family and community support of children's learning. They are meant to be advisory and should be adapted to each school's or district's needs.

Parenting and Family Skills

- ❑ 1. We sponsor parent education and family learning workshops.
- ❑ 2. We ask families what types of workshops or informational events they would be interested in attending and what session times are most convenient for them.
- ❑ 3. We provide families with information on child development.
- ❑ 4. We lend families books and tapes on parenting and parent workshops.
- ❑ 5. We provide families with information about developing home conditions that support school learning.
- ❑ 6. We survey parents to determine their needs, assign staff members to help address those needs, and work to link parents with community resources.
- ❑ 7. We have a family resource center or help parents access other resource centers in the community.
- ❑ 8. We have support groups for families with special interests and needs.
- ❑ 9. We train staff members and support them in reaching out to all families.

Communicating

- ❑ 1. We have parent-teacher-student conferences to establish student learning goals for the year.
- ❑ 2. We listen to parents tell us about their children's strengths and how they learn.
- ❑ 3. We follow the "Rule of Seven:" offering seven different ways that parents and community members can learn about what is happening in the school and comment on it.
- ❑ 4. Teachers have ready access to telephones to communicate with parents during or after the school day.
- ❑ 5. Staff members send home positive messages about students.
- ❑ 6. We make efforts to communicate with fathers.
- ❑ 7. Parents know the telephone numbers of school staff members and the times teachers are available to take phone calls from parents.
- ❑ 8. We involve families in student award and recognition events.
- ❑ 9. We encourage and make provisions for staff members to talk with parents about the child's progress several times each semester.
- ❑ 10. We communicate the school's mission and expectations for students to parents. The school has a homework hotline or other kind of telephone system.
- ❑ 11. We provide parents with structured ways to comment on the school's communications, for example, with mailed, phone, or take-home surveys.
- ❑ 12. We have staff members available to assist and support parents in their interactions with the school (i.e. home-school liaisons).
- 13. We send home communications about
  - ❑ student academic progress
  - ❑ meetings at school
  - ❑ how parents can be involved in student activities
  - ❑ PTA/PTO
  - ❑ student discipline
  - ❑ child development
  - ❑ the curriculum
  - ❑ how parents can be involved as volunteers
  - ❑ how parents can be involved in school governance
  - ❑ how parents can help with homework and encourage learning at home
  - ❑ community resources available to families
  - ❑ how parents can communicate with school staff
  - ❑ the school's philosophy of learning.
- ❑ 14. Staff members make home visits.
- ❑ 15. We directly speak to parents (does not include leaving messages on answering machines) if students are having academic difficulty or causing classroom disruptions before a crisis occurs.
- ❑ 16. We provide copies of school textbooks and publications about the school to the public library.

Learning at Home

- ❑ 1. We have a structured program to help parents assist their children with homework.
- ❑ 2. We offer learning activities and events for the whole family.

- ☐ 3. We invite parents to borrow resources from school libraries for themselves and their families.
- ☐ 4. We link parents with resources and activities in the community that promote learning.
- ☐ 5. We give parents questionnaires they can use to evaluate their child's progress and provide feedback to teachers.
- ☐ 6. School staff and school communications help parents link home learning activities to learning in the classroom.

Volunteering

- ☐ 1. We encourage families and other community members to attend school events.
- ☐ 2. We offer youth service learning opportunities for students who want to volunteer in the community.
- ☐ 3. We help school staff learn how to work with parent and community volunteers.
- ☐ 4. We ask family members how they would like to participate as volunteers at their child's school or in the community.
- 5. We encourage family and community members to become involved as
  - ☐ participants in site-based management councils
  - ☐ presenters to students on careers and other topics
  - ☐ assistants with art shows, read-aloud events, theater workshops, book swaps, and other activities
  - ☐ tutors/mentors
  - ☐ chaperones on field trips and other class outings
  - ☐ instructional assistants in classrooms, libraries, and computer labs
  - ☐ non-instructional assistants
  - ☐ from-the-home contributors of baked goods, assembling materials, typing, etc.
- ☐ 6. We have a program to recognize school volunteers.
- ☐ 7. We offer volunteer opportunities for working and single parents.
- ☐ 8. We gather information about the level and frequency of family and community participation in school programs.

Governance and Advocacy

- ☐ 1. We encourage parents to attend school board meetings.
- ☐ 2. We assign staff members to help parents address concerns or complaints.
- ☐ 3. We invite staff and parent groups to meet collaboratively.
- ☐ 4. We help families advocate for each other.
- 5. We involve parents in
  - ☐ revising school and district curricula
  - ☐ planning orientation programs for new families
  - ☐ developing parenting skills programs
  - ☐ establishing membership for site-based councils
  - ☐ hiring staff members.

Community Outreach

- ☐ 1. We act as a source of information and referral about services available in the community for families.
- ☐ 2. We use a variety of strategies to reach out to adults, families, and children of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the community.
- ☐ 3. We encourage local civic and service groups to become involved in schools in a variety of ways such as mentoring students, volunteering, speaking to classes, and helping with fund-raising events.
- ☐ 4. We encourage staff and students to participate in youth service learning opportunities.
- ☐ 5. We open our school buildings for use by the community beyond regular school hours.
- ☐ 6. We work with the local chamber of commerce or business partnership council and public library to promote adult literacy.
- ☐ 7. We have a program with local businesses that enhances student work skills.
- ☐ 8. We widely publish and disseminate school board meeting notices, summaries, and board policies and agendas, and encourage the feedback and participation of community members.

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